


a Richt **Bourachie** *o' Fowk*

Stories from the Castlegate, the Toun and Denmore Court

Denmore Court Oral History Group



ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

a Richt **Bourachie** *o' Fowk*

Stories from the Castlegate, the Toun and Denmore Court

Denmore Court Oral History Group

This book of reminiscences was compiled by the residents of Denmore Court. It follows on from the popular "*Here's Tae Us, Wha's Like Us*" and contains sometimes touching, sometimes funny, accounts of the characters who roamed the streets of Aberdeen and played to the citizens for a few pennies. It includes memories of the Castlegate as a market place and other more general reminiscences that all combine to create a unique and very special portrait of our city.

With special thanks once again to Lizzie Finlayson and all at Denmore Court who made this book possible.

			<i>page</i>
The Castlegate - a brief background			<i>i -iv</i>
Chapter 1	<i>Foul Friday</i>	Group	1-2
Chapter 2	<i>Jang Lang</i>	Group	3-4
Chapter 3	<i>Cockles and Mussels (A Devoted Couple)</i>	Group	5-6
Chapter 4	<i>A Loving Couple...</i>	Isabella Smith	7-8
Chapter 5	<i>The Kaiser</i>	Lizzie Finlayson	9-11
Chapter 6	<i>The Crown and Anchor Board</i>	George Harper	12-13
Chapter 7	<i>The Castlegate: Drawing the Crowds</i>	Group	14-15
Chapter 8	<i>The Castlegate: More Characters</i>	Group	15-16
Chapter 9	<i>The Castlegate: The Stalls</i>	Group	16-19
Chapter 10	<i>The Castlegate: The Salvation Army</i>	Group	19-20
Chapter 11	<i>Easter Eggs and Whiskers</i>	Group	21
Chapter 12	<i>Souvenir of Japan</i>	Babs Duncan	22-24
Chapter 13	<i>Homie Life</i>	Anonymous	24-26
Chapter 14	<i>Crofting</i>	Lena Jamieson	27-28
Chapter 15	<i>The Tattie Cairt</i>	William Tough	28-29
Chapter 16	<i>"A Halfpenny Worth of Coffee as a Treat"</i>	Group	30-32
Chapter 17	<i>Druggies - A Poem</i>	Lizzie Finlayson	33



The Castlegate

- a brief background

The original commercial centre of Aberdeen was the Green, but as the medieval burgh grew the centre moved to the site now known as the Castlegate.

In 1661 Parson Gordon, the city's first map-maker wrote,

The Castlegate is a square, about a hundred walking paces in breadth and twice as much in length, nor can Scotland show such another. It is the market place and gives room abundantly to the weekly market, which is made by the confluence of the country people dwelling near the town

The town's house or Tolbooth takes up the north-west corner.

In the Castlegate, stand the two market crosses; the high cross before the Tolbooth, called also the flesh cross, by reason of the shambles and flesh market beside it; the other lesser cross situated at some distance to the eastward is called the fish cross at which there is a daily fish market.

Market day at the Green, Aberdeen's original commercial hub





[The Castlegate and the Mannie

The modern ‘granite’ city first began to develop in the 1770s when the appearance of the Castlegate was substantially changed.

Castlegate Well / The ‘Mannie’.

The Mannie is one of the few examples of leaden sculpture in the city. In 1706 work began on laying lead water pipes from Carden’s well to a new fountain in the Castlegate, to bring new supplies of drinking water to the growing population.

In 1708 the town council contracted William Lindsay, goldsmith, to make a brass statue for the fountain. It was to be ‘a statue of three foot and a half high...for the water to play and issue from the said statue, and the four antick faces on the corners...’.

By 1710 Lindsay had not completed his work and the council ordered a gilded wood statute to adorn the fountain before the current sculpture was installed. The Mannie was moved to the Green in 1852 and then returned to the Castlegate in the 1970s.

Ports

Aberdeen's lockable town gates were known as ports, from the French *porte*, meaning door. Medieval Aberdeen had six ports; two were located within the Castlegate.

Fittie Port, standing at the head of Fittie Wynd, led to the fishing village of the same name.

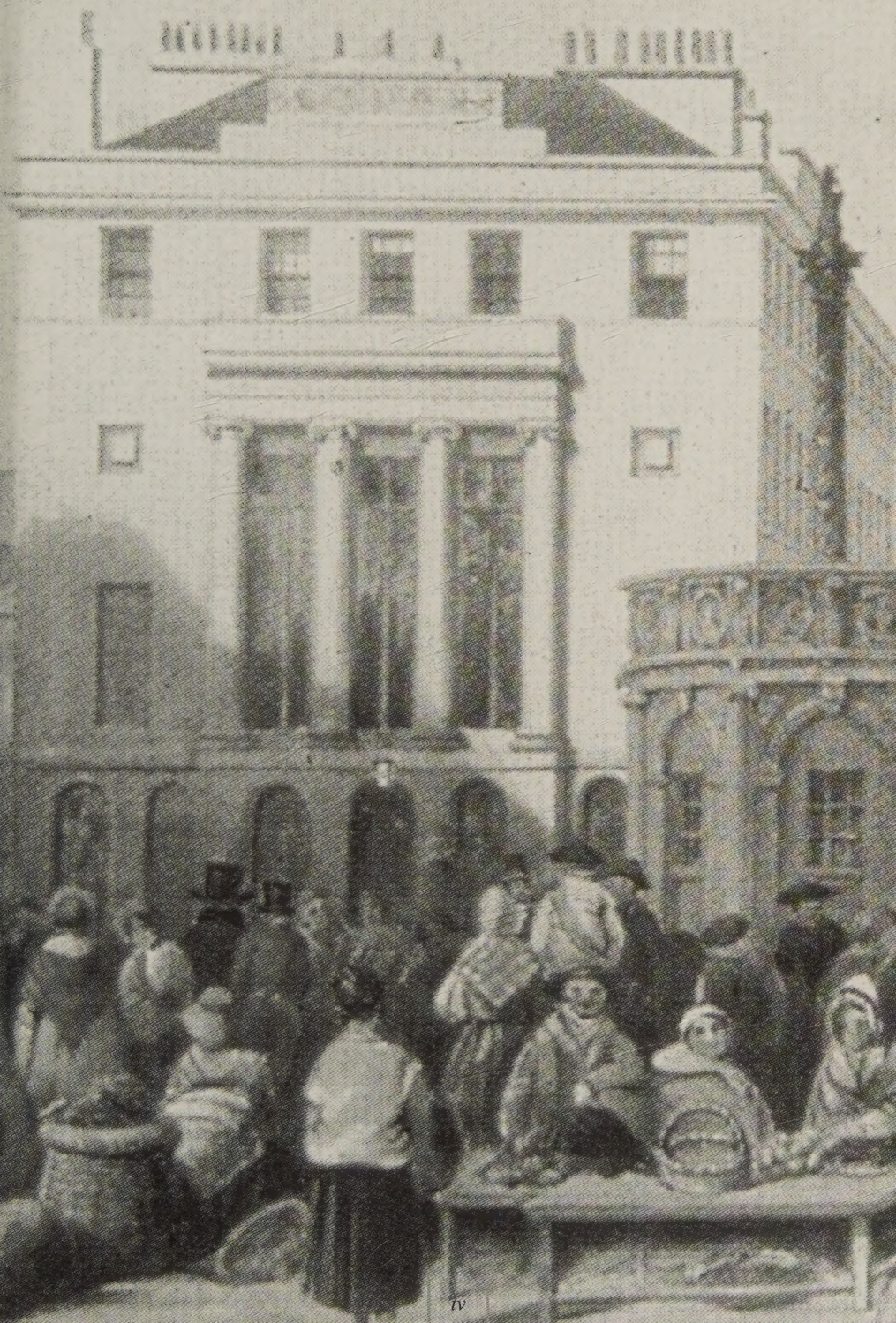
Justice Port led to the nearby Heading Hill where some public executions were carried out. It is believed that limbs of the condemned were displayed upon the port.

The Castlegate was also the site for public executions. The condemned criminal would walk there from the Tolbooth, which served as the town's gaol until the nineteenth century. The last public hanging at the Castlegate took place in 1857.

The Tollbooth and the Town House



At the time when the memories held in these pages were being formed, the Castlegate was still being used as a weekly market place and a place where people came to talk, much like they do at Hyde Park Corner in London today. In and amongst these everyday events moved the characters that make up our book. They roamed the streets of Aberdeen, trying to eke out a living by giving some sort of performance for the few pennies flung in their direction by the sympathetic public. Although very little was known about them, like ships passing in the night, we think they are worth a mention.





Chapter 1: Foul Friday

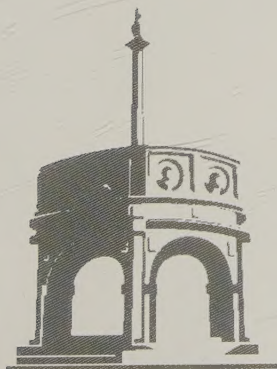
One of the best known characters of the twenties was known as Foul Friday. Very few people knew his real name. As his name implies, he was not very hygienic. His clothes hung about him untidily and he wore mittens, with half-fingers, and his face could have done with a wash.

In Summer he roamed the streets pushing his ice-cream cart. In winter he used another cart, with a grill, possibly charcoal, on which he roasted chestnuts. A few pence would buy a homemade paper poke of the hot delicacies. He lived alone in an upstairs room in the Adelphi. A story circulating about him was that he spent every Sunday lying beside the grave of his wife. Whether truth or fiction it is open to speculation.

He was however, basically a kind man, smiling as he served you. He had a peculiar way of speaking and I can't place his accent.

As there was little social security then, it was a case of work or want. There were many hopeless characters in the same circumstances. Some would sing in the backyards, others busking in theatre or cinema queues.

As a child I felt sorry for Foul Friday, but his ice cream was delicious.





Copyright
Graham Fyfe M.A.

Chapter 2: Jang Lang

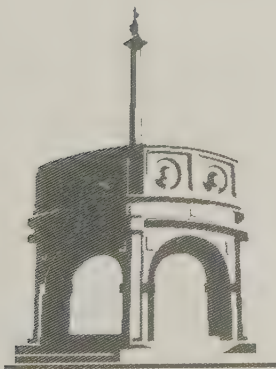
One of the street entertainers in the twenties was Jang Lang. He toured the streets, pushing a barrel organ, and he had a monkey that pranced about on top, or ambled along beside him.

He would stop at strategic spots and at the turn of a handle he could produce the most beautiful music.

When we, as children saw him wheeling his instrument along, we would run indoors to ask our mothers for a penny for the organ grinder.

He had many changes of music and while the music rang out the monkey danced and capered around much to the children's delight.

We of course didn't realise that this was his way of making a living. He would even accept farthings, which were legal tender at that time.





Chapter 3: Cockles and Mussels (A Devoted Couple)

Why an old couple was nicknamed after shellfish is a mystery. Was their favourite song the one about Molly Malone? Whatever the reason, they were well known street singers in the quiet streets of Aberdeen.

What we do know is that they performed as songsters in the Music Halls and variety theatres in Scotland. When they had to retire, before pensions were the norm, they would have had to find ways and means to augment their savings, if they had any.

They chose to do what they knew best. They decided to sing and began to go round the backies (backyards) and quiet traffic free roads. They were quite a good-looking old couple, although she must have been rather frail.

When they had decided on their stance, he would knock on the door of a nearby house and borrow a chair. His wife would then sit on it and their performance would begin. Pennies would be thrown down from upstairs windows, where the audience would sit. Other neighbours would send the children with their offerings.

The length of their stay would depend on the offerings. He would wear a dark grey overcoat, which reached down to his feet, and on his head he had a soft felt hat, with a brim and a dent from back to front on the crown. It had a mauve band all round it just above the brim. His wife's clothes also swept the ground, it was the fashion then, and of course ladies always wore a covering on their head, a shawl maybe or in her case, a hat.

Maybe they were just street singers, but they were too proud to go to the Parish Council for help. They could have been sent to the poorhouse, depending on their savings, and would most certainly have been separated. I think of them as a devoted couple.



Copyright
Graham Fyfe M.A.



Chapter 4: A Loving Couple

Isabella Smith

The wee story I am about to relate happened in the early 1940s, when I was a young energetic woman in my early thirties.

It was on a Saturday forenoon, I heard a persistent tapping on my door. I felt a bit disgruntled, as I was busy preparing the family meal and had had a very busy morning of baking and housework. However, I went to open my door to find a very shabby and tired looking wee couple looking at me piteously. The woman had a tray of items such as packets of wee buttons, reels of cotton, cards of pins and pairs of shoelaces; the tray was suspended from her neck by a length of string. The man was shivering from the cold and she looked at him so anxiously.

I felt so sorry for their piteous state that I invited them into the heat of my kitchen. This they were reluctant to do but eventually I managed to coax them. On went the kettle and I suggested a cuppa, deciding on cocoa with lots of milk. They hugged the mugs in their icy cold hands and drank from them greedily.

They were most reticent about themselves but did tell me they were living in the Lodging House and were selling their wares to provide for a bed. I bought a few items from their tray of wares and then they hastened to get away. I invited them back the following Saturday, telling them I found their wares so handy. They said they'd walked all the way from the top end of King Street to my home, then in Holburn Road. Where they got the stamina from was hard to know. At that time it was only a penny in old money for the tram from one bridge to the other, Dee to Don, so I surreptitiously laid on a few extra pence on their tray, to make sure, I hoped, they took the tram back to their abode.

They paid a few more visits and welcomed their cuppa with a well-buttered homemade scone. I suspected they made that their dinner! What a devoted, brave wee couple they were.

Then the visits stopped until later on she appeared at my door on her own. I asked where her husband was and she told me with tears running down her cheeks, he was in hospital and was critically ill with pneumonia. Poor soul, she was devastated and duly hastened away to visit him later on.

I had no more visits and deduced that the man had died, but what of her? I wondered what would become of her. At the time my own husband was ill and admitted to hospital for another operation and with the worry of visiting him and looking after my family, time passed and gradually they faded from my memory. But now and again I would remember them and wonder about that devoted, courageous wee couple, who came knock, knock, knocking at my door one busy Saturday forenoon.



Copyright
Graham Fyfe M.A.

Chapter 5: The Kaiser

Lizzie Finlayson

He was a tall lean man and everyone called him the Kaiser. According to my mother his name was unpronounceable. He was a German and had been working in the Torry shipyards when war broke out in 1914. He was promptly interned as an enemy or at least a potential spy. Eventually he was allowed back to work under strict supervision.

He lived alone in a ground floor flat in Ferry Road and went quietly about his business. He was left in peace by the fisher folk but was a great favourite with the children. He seemed to like us also and if he went to the bottom of the street he would be surrounded by us children. *A swing! A swing!* We would shout and one by one he would lift us up and swing us from side to side and even up in the air while we screamed with delight.

Another reason for his popularity with us was the fact that he owned a huge telescope, which he could fold up so small that he could put it into his coat pocket. From the bottom of the street we could see right along the shore and watch the ships enter the harbour. He would tell us to close one eye and then he would focus the long thin instrument until the incoming boat came so near to us that we would put out a hand to touch it. Of course, we never could.

When he spoke to us it was in very guttural tones. I was five years old when the war came to an end, and I could never understand why some of the young soldiers coming home would spit and shout angrily at him when he passed them by. To me he was a very nice man. When my own father arrived home in 1919, he looked gorgeous, dressed in his Gordon Highlanders kilt. I was sorry when he changed into his ordinary suit.

One day I saw him talking with the Kaiser and I was very pleased at this. I asked him later why some of the other men were being so unkind to him and calling him names. "It's only ignorance." He replied and went on to explain that the Kaiser was German and that Britain had been at war with Germany for the past few years and that the young men still felt resentful.

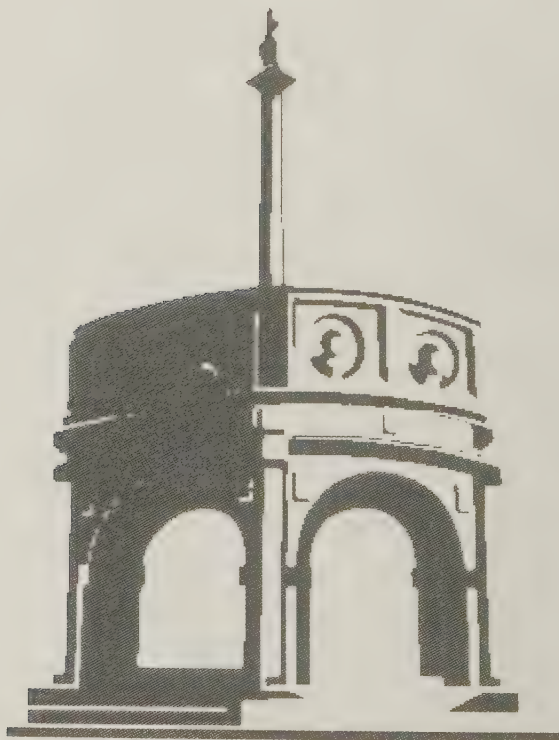
"But the war is over." I protested.

"Yes, but some folk have long memories." With that I had to be content.

A short time later a huge van appeared in the street. It was belching steam and all us children ran to watch what was going to happen next. A young man leapt down from the very high driver's seat and another from the other side. The van had parked outside the Kaiser's door, but there was no sign of our friend. The men proceeded to carry out furniture and soon the van was loaded. It left the street with steam filling the air.

We never saw our German friend again, although rumours abounded. Some said he had been re-arrested, that he had been a spy all along, hence the huge telescope. The more charitable view was that he'd had word that his wife and children were still alive in Germany and he was going to join them there.

I favoured the second version, although I was sorry that he'd never said goodbye to us children. We missed him at first, but soon accepted the fact that he was gone forever. I felt that I just had to include him in my list of characters.



Chapter 6: The Crown and Anchor Board

The 'Crown and Anchor' was an illegal gambling game that drew groups of men up to Broad Hill and The Gramps, where it was played. The police were always on the hunt for them but the players kept a lookout and when the police were spotted, the gamblers scattered.

It used to start at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning. If there were any money left over from Saturday night they'd spend it on Crown and Anchor. They'd post four people to look out for the Police. The Police knew it went on and now and again they would raid it, not often but now and again. If the Police did raid it, they would confiscate all the money in sight. So all the people would keep their money in their pockets and pay out only if they had to. There used to be three gangs for Crown and Anchor.

Anon: That's a game I really know about, that's the first job I had when I left school. Carryin' the gear for the Crown and Anchor. I carried it for Campbell the baker. It was one game where the punter had absolutely no chance.



Residents of Denmore Court playing for washers!

The original boards were made of metal and there used to be a silk cloth over the board, you could buy them in the shops. It was shaped like a sort of tent with a full handle on top and it came down in a triangular fashion like a point. You had to spin it to play the game. That was the real Crown and Anchor. The dice came later.

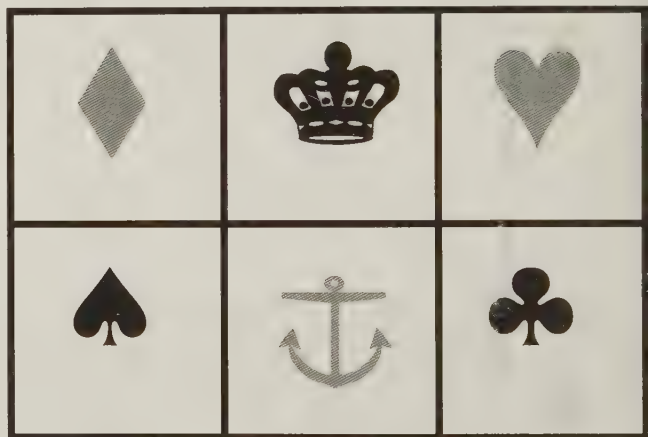
The Crown and Anchor Game

The game dates from the 1700s, when it was popular among sailors and fishermen.

The gameboard, sometimes a cloth, was divided into six squares. In each square a symbol was drawn, in the bottom squares a Diamond, the Crown and a Heart, and in the top squares a Spade, the Anchor and a Club.

Three identical dies had the same six symbols on their faces. There was no limit to how many people could play the game. Players took turns in being the banker.

How the Crown & Anchor Game Board looked



The players would place their money on their chosen squares (they could bet on more than one) and all three dies would be rolled by the banker. If for instance

the die rolled a Heart, a Diamond and the Anchor all the money would be removed from the other squares (players who had placed their bets there had already lost), added to the bankers funds and then shared out among the winning squares. For example if someone had placed money on the Crown, and the Crown had been rolled, his money would be matched. If the die rolled two symbols the same, the money would be doubled; three symbols and it would be tripled.

Chapter 7: The Castlegate: Drawing the Crowds

The boys from the Bridge of Don would come into town on the bumpers of tram cars. They'd get as far as School Road sometimes and the conductor would chase them off, so they'd wait for the next tram. It could take up to eight trams to get to the Castlegate. Lots of people used to go down there to speak. The old preachers would be there, the 'hellfire and damnation' lot and the politicians. One was Mosley's sidekick, one of those fascist boys. He was put on top of a coal cart and the crowd pushed him down Marischal Street into the harbour! If the crowd didn't like ye, that's what happened.

The Minister from the church across from the Arts Centre used to go there every Sunday and would challenge anyone who was there speaking. Communists or the Labour man or the Tories. He would challenge them; it used to be interesting to hear them. There's nowhere like that in Aberdeen now.



*A Blackshirt defending the Fascist cause at the first
Fascist meeting held in the Castlegate*

There were always especially large crowds in the Castlegate on a Saturday. There was a young man who attracted a big circle of people around him, as he was a really good player. He was stopped playing by the police because when he used to get money from the public, his parents would take it to buy drink. One Saturday the police took him away and the crowd all threw money after him. The police were good enough to let him pick it up. He went on to tour in a band called Curly McKay's. (His son actually still plays, mainly for Older People's Clubs and Complexes.)

Another fellow played an accordion and there was someone who played a saw with a violin bow, a musical saw, and there were six or seven people who used to sing. They would start there at about a quarter to midnight and the people in the windows round about would watch them. There was never a bit of trouble. That was where the Arts building is now, right on that corner.



Chapter 8: The Castlegate: More Characters

There were some great characters about the Castlegate. There used to be a bar there that started selling red wine instead of beer and you could get a big glass for a penny. All these characters would collect there and get cheap drink!

There was a man and his wife and daughter, who sold fruit. He was called Old Troupie and if he got a chance to serve a customer he would strut over to the bar with the takings and have a drink. His wife used to keep an eye on him. He did manage it when they were busy though. He used to sing: *"Try me 'ingins, hard and dry, and so am I."*

Then there was a wee man who had a stall and he had a big display foot made of plaster and he used to say that he could cure people's corns. He made up small boxes of this stuff and he had a name for it, but people got wise to him, as what he was putting in the boxes was Vaseline! Some people still bought it.

Bronco was also someone who went about the Castlegate. He used to pull teeth with his fingers! He'd say: *"I'll give you a bottle of this (drink) for nothing if you feel your tooth*

coming out.” The reason you didn’t feel your tooth coming out was because you’d open your mouth and he’d hit the tooth that was sore, then pull it out! According to some of the older people that knew him, they said his forearm was just one mass of muscle.

There was Candy Carrots who had one of those machines for spinning sugar. You could buy a bag of it for thrupence. Twang, who’d get a clean suit every three months and if you ever got him sober and asked him to sign his name, he would sign his name and put his letters BSc, MA, BA, you mention it. He collected degrees like other folk collected stamps! He got his name from the Jews harp he carried and played. He held it to his mouth and plucked with his fingers. He was no singer and he had no words, but he would try and each word sounded like *twang, twang*.

There used to be a couple who sang outside McMillans. They were supposed to be blind. They’d be standing there with their caps and you’d put in a ha’penny and he would ask his wife: “Did he give you a penny?” “No,” she’d say, “he gave me a ha’penny, the mean swine!”

Then there was the man that would give you an electric shock. It was a challenge, to see how bold you were and how you could stand it. He had wires connected to an old battery and a basin of water that he put the handles in. If you could put your hands in and take the handles completely out; you got your money back.



Chapter 9: The Castlegate: The Stalls

The stalls sold mostly fruit, second hand clothes and bed linen. On a Saturday night you could go down to the Castlegate, as they were clearing the stalls and sold their fruit and sweets cheap. You could get a big bag of sweets and fruit for 1/-. Melons, chipped pears and other damaged fruit. We cut off all the bad parts and ate the best bits.

There was another stall, beside the Salvation Army citadel, quite a high back and you got five bags, different kinds of sweets for one shilling. That was tuppence for more

than a quarter. When the men went out in an evening, maybe for a wee tippie, they'd come hame with sweeties to soften their wives' hearts.

There would be exotic fruits there too. You couldnae afford them, but you could look at them. When it came to the time of the Timmer Market there was a lot of plums. The Timmer Market was the last Thursday in August, every year. Timmer means timber, as everything was made of wood. There were wooden pencil cases for bairns, barras, rocking horses, spurtles! We still have spurtles to stir our porridge!

Mina: I'll tell you a story of the Timmer Market, a personal story. When I was about six or seven I broke my leg. When my dad, who was an engineer on the trawlers, came home from the sea, he was upset to see my leg in plaster. Next day was 'settling' day and on his way home from collecting his pay he went into the Timmer Market and bought two melons. There was a big one, because there was seven of us, and he had this small one, which he gave to me. Once the big one was finished my brothers would say: "Come on, gis a bit" but no, I ate every bit of it and made myself sick. If anyone says melon to me now, I shudder! We used to keep the seeds and dry them and make them into necklaces. You could dye them too. If you put them into strong tea, you got a nice brown colour.

Timmer Market, Aberdeen



We were easy pleased though. There were monkey nuts and tiger nuts, Candy Low used to sell them. We called her that because she used to sell candy apples and things at the school gates. Her name was Low. There were 'Oggie Poggie Eyes' too. You sucked



Stalls at the Timmer Market

them and would take them out to look at because they were a different colour. They weren't very hygienic. You could be playing with something mucky and you put your hand in to your mouth to see what colour your Oogle Poggle Eye was as it grew smaller.

Some of the young people used to smoke kennies, cinnamon sticks. They had an awful smell. You thought you were smoking because you lit them. You'd get a whacking for that. You'd light it and smoke it like a cigarette. When your mother smelt it, you couldn't deny that you'd been smoking. You'd get them from the Chemist. They came over when the soldiers were in the army in India, they came home with a lot of stuff. One of the shops in the Gallowgate sold coffee. You get halfpenny worth of coffee as a treat. That had come from India too, with the curry.

Lena: I remember the first time I tasted coffee. I was at this girl's house and her mother gave us a hot drink and we thought it was tea. I said, "Is your tea burnt?" and she said "Aye, it is!"

There was a man who claimed that he could fix illnesses, who knows if it was true! Danta his name was and he had a stall beside the Salvation Army Citadel and he used to dispense medicines. Any illness you had, he had a cure for it. He would stand at his

stall and people would stand up and listen to his oratory. Eventually he went into a shop in the citadel building. It was like a chemist long ago, with the bottles in the window.

We didnae go to the doctor in those days. You couldnae afford them! A doctor was 3 and 6 for a call and it would maybe be cash in hand. Some of the doctors were quite kind and if you had no money they would treat you anyway. There were many home remedies though, like if you had a cough, your mother wrapped a woollen sock around your neck.

There were these lights at the Castlegate. They were quite scary for children, especially at night. They were just carbide Tilly lamps but the flares made such a hissing noise. Then there was the 1929 storm. It lasted for two days.

Betty: The rain came in sheets and it was very dark. I remember coming home for dinner and no mother in the kitchen. She was hid under the table it was so scary. There was no dinner that day! I got a bag of plums and was dying to get home to eat them. We took a tram home and I remember my mother saying it was eight o'clock. I was terrified and ran under the bed.

Mina: I think Betty, it was after twelve noon because my friend and I were both home for our lunch and going back were caught in King Street. Everybody was late for work that day.



Chapter 10: The Castlegate: The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army Citadel stands on the Castlegate. Schoolchildren used to go there on Sunday evenings or sometimes to John Street (off George Street) where they had a smaller hall. They also had a meeting place at Glenbervie Road, Torry. The Salvation Army brass band would march around the various streets and form a circle, asking people to join in. The children would sing various hymns and perform all the actions.

A lady Salvationist, Mrs Ironside, now deceased, formed a group that called themselves 'The Timbrels'. They would visit pensioner's meetings and give a performance with exercises and tambourines.



Castle Street and the Salvation Army Citadel

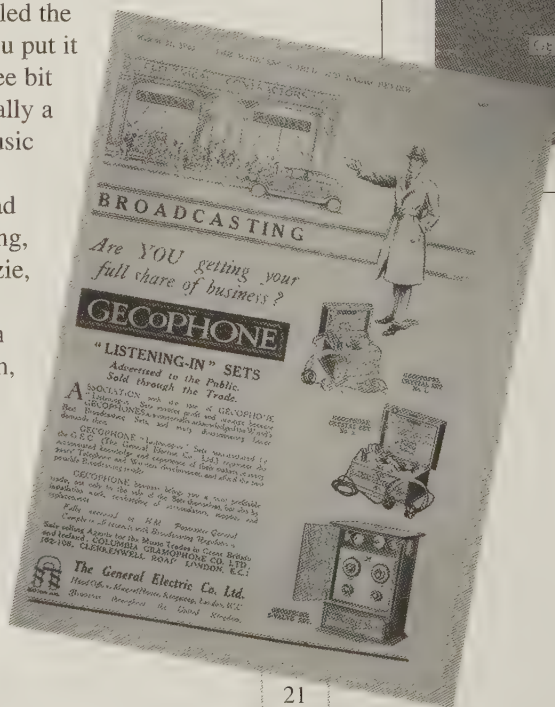
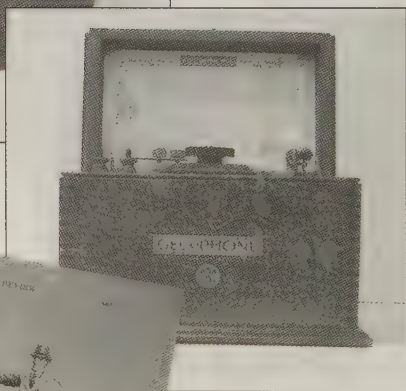
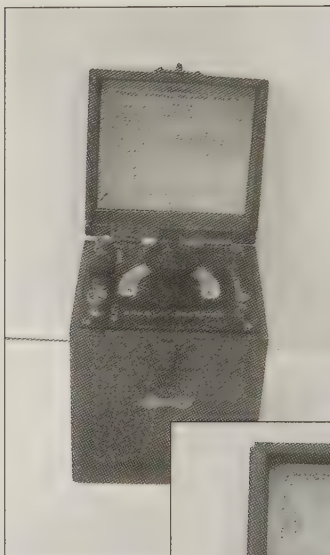
Lizzie: I was thrown out of the Salvation Army once. I'm not proud of it. A group of us would go to the Citadel on Sunday afternoons. We heard that one of the lads in our street was to be sworn in under the flags on this particular day. He had already been to the Mercy Seat and wanted to join the band. We all knew him to be a bad lad, a bit of a ladies' man, and we wanted to see his transformation. So there we were, six of us up in the gallery, looking down on the platform. In the tiered seats on the left were the bandsmen and their golden instruments. On the right side were the choristers including the 'Timbrels', and the pulpit in the centre front. Behind this stood Danny, flanked by two officers, each holding a Salvation Army flag above his head. It was interesting really until one of the girls in our group started to giggle. Others soon joined in. A Salvation Army major was there in a second and pointed an accusing finger at each of us in turn. "Out, out, out!" He shouted. I never felt so ashamed in my life!

The funerals stood out in your memory too. The Salvation Army band walked all the way to the cemetery, playing their instruments, followed by the mourners. There weren't so many cars on the road then.

Chapter 11: Easter Eggs and a Cat's Whisker

Babs: We never got chocolate Easter Eggs. Your mother put your egg in the teapot until it was brown and if it was too cold to take it to the Broad Hill, where you usually went to roll it, you rolled it at home. We used to do it on the bed and roll it down the bolster and pillows. That was smashing when you were young for there wasn't much amusement. My father made a cat's whisker wireless, ye ken, with wires and all that.

Lizzie: The first radio I ever saw, wireless we called it at the time was at my father's uncles. He used to take me visiting whenever he went. He, Uncle Ned, used a bit of curly wire (it was called the cat's whisker) and you put it onto a thing like a wee bit of lead, but was actually a crystal. It was all music and you had to wear earphones. When Dad and Ned started talking, Dad would say, "Lizzie, you must hear the wireless." I sat down with the earphones on, feeling quite contented. It wasn't til I was a wee bit older that I realized they didn't what me to hear what they were talking about. (Laughter)



Above:
A Crystal Receiver
'Cat's Whisker'
radio

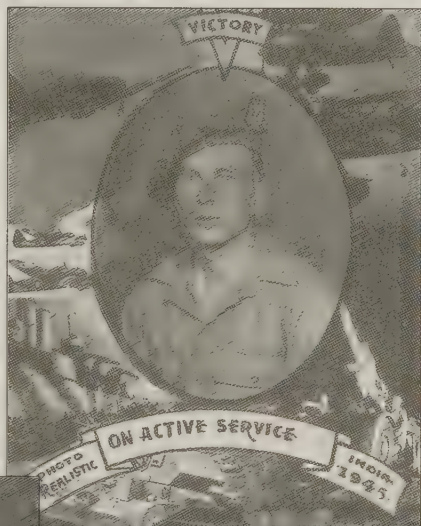
Left:
A 1929 review of
the 'crystal-set'
radio

Chapter 12: Souvenir of Japan

Babs Duncan

When I was first married, we had nowhere to live. My mother let us stay with her but when my baby was seven months old, mother and I had an argument and I went out carrying the baby. I wasn't sure where I was going but I had walked the chain bridge (Wellington) from Glenbervie Road in Torry when the air-raid siren blew. An air-raid warden made me go into the nearest shelter till the sirens gave the 'all-clear'.

My future mother in law took me in and found me two empty attic rooms from where I married my boyfriend. We had another child before he was called up in 1940. I was left with two children, a boy and a six-week-old baby girl. After his call up Bill was sent to Glasgow for training then was sent east to India and Singapore before being sent to Japan. He landed there with his battalion (of course) four days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. He was in the Cameron Highlanders. When he finally came home from the war he was a different man as he had lost four stone in weight. He told me that many of his companions had taken beri beri, which Bill compared to malaria with sickness and diarrhoea. They were sent home but Bill spent ten months there. He came home with skin and eyebrows yellow with jaundice. He wasn't demobbed until 1947. Once back at work he took various illnesses such as gout and hardening of the arteries and he was still only in his twenties. I then had another son and then



*Above:
Official
photograph*



*left:
Mr Duncan
brandishing
a Japanese
sword*



*Right:
Mr Duncan
(on left) in
uniform*

*Top right:
A Hiroshima
building before
the dropping of
the bomb*

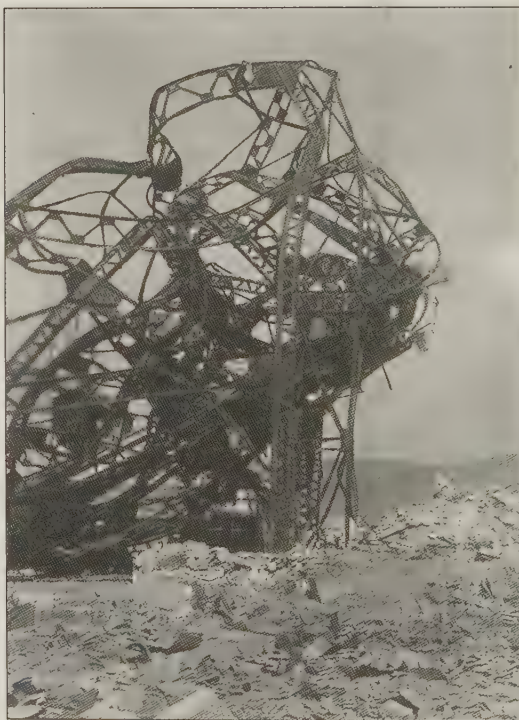


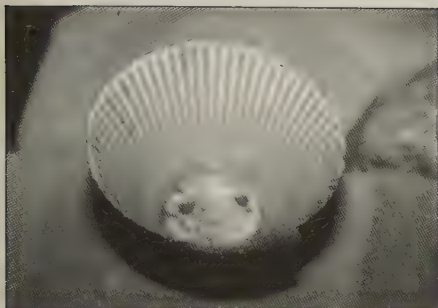
*Bottom right:
...afterwards.*

another daughter in 1949. The upbringing was quite hard but you had to manage and get on with it.

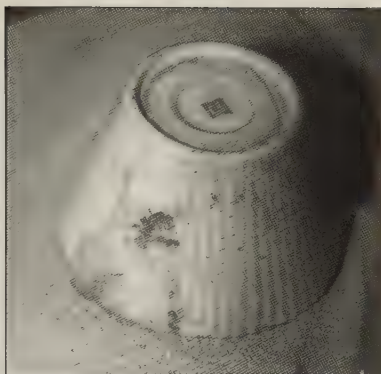
According to my late husband, the bowl he took home from Japan was an eating bowl for their lunch. He took home the bowl to let me see just how badly the radiation from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima had devastated the country. Men, women and children who suffered the explosion still suffer the terrible burns and injuries to this day. You can see what it did to this bowl and will imagine the condition of the people's bodies that suffered such burns.

My late husband was in a reserved job and wasn't called up until April 1942 for army service. He was first in the Royal Air Force, then the Highland Light Infantry and lastly the battalion of the Cameron Highlanders. He was an officer's batman while stationed in Japan. As he accompanied the officer wherever he went, he had many good times including being entertained by Geisha dancing girls. So all in all he had quite an exciting time for the ten months he was there after the war ceased.





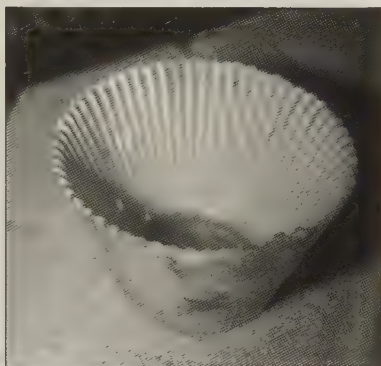
*The Japanese
tea bowl, the
damage
clearly visible*



My husband died 5th January 1999 nearly four years ago, which was my birth date also.

The bowl:

The vase was made of porcelain and was colourfully painted. It was actually used for the ceremonial drinking of tea at the Geisha girls parties. The heat of the Hiroshima explosion had melted part of the bowl and as it cooled, it became misshapen.



Chapter 13: Homie Life

Anonymous

I am writing this before I lose my eyesight altogether. Me eyes are getting very bad now.

When I was six years old, my mother became ill and was taken to the City Hospital in Aberdeen. My father had no option but had to put us, his five children into care and so we arrived in this house.

As a little girl of such tender years, I was amazed at this big place that I, along with my brothers and my sister, had been taken to. It was full of boys and girls of all ages. There was a very strict lady who we used to call Matron, but if we had to answer her, it had to be 'Yes Ma'am'. If you forgot to say Ma'am, you got a smack on the ear that nearly sent you to the other end of the kitchen. I should know, for I had a few.

From the age of eight, we were taught housework and as you got older the more work you had to do. At six o'clock in the morning we all had to get up. Any child who had wet the bed had to stand in a corner with the wet sheets around their necks and then they were put into a bath of cold water and pushed under three times, even in wintertime. The worst of it was that you could not tell anyone as we were told that no tales were to be carried out of the home. If you ever spoke back to a person who was one day older than yourself you got another hiding.

At mealtimes, we always started with a prayer and ended with hymns. During the meal, if you spoke at the table, you were told to leave the table. Then the matron would tell you to go to the cupboard and take out spice, mustard, bitter aloes or cascara and you would have to take a spoonful of it. I got quite used to it but I just had to tell my pal at school what happened.

Monday was an awful day in the home. Matron always seemed to rise in a particularly bad mood, though I seldom saw her in a good mood. It was the day our school clothes were laid out for us for the week. If we helped ourselves to them we got a thick ear. On occasions, even if you waited, you still got a smack. You just couldn't win.

When I reached the age of twelve years old, boy did I have to work, especially on a washing day. Of course, there was no washing machine in those days. We used a scrubbing board and a hard brush and there were forty kids plus the matron to wash for. She had the most awful temper at any time but, as I stated above, you had to look out for her, especially on Mondays. She would be in a bad temper all day and you daren't speak back. I knew somewhere inside me, however, that one day I might get the opportunity to do so.

Meals were very scanty. We got porridge in the morning but no tea, soup and pudding for lunch, again without tea and for supper we got a slice and a half of bread with watery cocoa. On Saturdays we got an inch of cheese and tea. Big deal!

I survived the next few years, although I received plenty of hidings in between. I became quite hardened and certain that my day would come.

When I became fourteen years old, I had the choice either to leave the home or to stay on as a maid. I must have been a good worker for the Matron asked me to stay. I could have said 'No, I've had enough of homie life', but I felt that this was my chance to get my own back on her. I think she rued the day she asked me to stay on as a maid, for I

turned out to be the most impudent maid she ever had. I knew I could now speak back to her and she could do nothing about it. After all those years, I had a lot to say, knowing she could not hit me any more.

Before I turned fourteen, the biggest punishment the Matron could hand out to me was when she said, 'You won't get to see your Dad on Saturday', as that was the only time we saw him. I would willingly have taken more hidings than not to see my Dad. I knew he would come up at night to see me, but that was not the same as getting out to see him. I used to hope that by the Saturday she would forget any threats she had issued earlier in the week, but not her.

The jobs she found for me to do were to scrub all the black lead brushes, and shoe brushes, all the wooden clothes pegs, even sweeping brushes and the handles of the shovels. When that was all done, we had to scrub out the shelter where we dined, all the tables and forms, and then rinse them all with cold water. The Matron had a favourite strap she used to use. She kept it locked up in the electric cupboard but it went missing one day and, in fact, was never seen again. The Matron had a good idea who had taken it, but she had no proof that it was me. It gave me great satisfaction when I put it into the fire.

I could go on and on about homie life but as I said, I turned out to be the most impudent maid she ever had. One of the reasons for this was that I now felt that I had to stick up for my youngest brother, as by this time my other two brothers and my sister had left the home. As my younger brother was one of the bairns who wet the bed, he got the cold bath treatment after being wrapped in a wet sheet about his face. One day, she lifted a bamboo cane and was about to hit him, but I snatched it from her hand. She couldn't report me in case the stories of her cruelty came out.

We used to like it when the Matron went on her fortnight's holiday and her niece took over. The niece would give us all toffee apple and the bairns who wet the bed were given a hot water bottle. There was little bed-wetting until, of course, the Matron came back and stopped the bottles.

I left the home when I turned seventeen years old, but not before I put her best silver teapot on the gas ring, left it full on and melted it. I would have liked to have seen her face when she went to serve tea to her visitors. The reason that I left was that the farmer who delivered milk to the home liked the way I handled the milk cans. He offered me a job, I accepted it and I am pleased to say that I was happy there.

As a dairymaid, I took to farm life like a duck to water and in time I married a cattleman. I just loved country life. No more Monday and Friday bath nights, with added washing soda, disinfectant and carbolic soap. I was happy in my new life, but I can never forget the cruel treatment in the home.



A typical Aberdeenshire croft

Chapter 14: Crofting

Lena Jamieson

When I was a young woman the land just outside Aberdeen had wee crofts all over the place. The crofting system involved rearing a few cattle, chickens and growing crops to feed the animals. When the cows were 'ready' they would be taken to the cattle mart at Kittybrewster to be sold for beef. It was also at the Kittybrewster cattle mart that the crofter would go to buy his animals.

Because the croft alone would not pay enough, the crofter would have another job, usually as a farm labourer. Both my husband and my father-in-law were dairy cattlemen as well as being crofters. They both worked at Davidsons, a big farm with lots of cattle for dairy and slaughter.

At Exchange Street and the Castlegate there used to be a Fee Mart held every six months in May and November. The farm labourers would come in to town after their six months of employment came to



A Recruiting Officer and a farm 'loon'



The crowds gather for a recruiting meeting in the Castlegate

an end and tried to get work at another farm. I read once about the Highlanders coming down to enlist too. They would be enticed by a shilling or a kiss from the Duchess of Gloucester! Like in the Army, the farmer would give them money for joining up.

Once they had been enlisted by a farmer, they were ‘fee’d’ to him for six months. It was hard work and poorly paid. My friend’s father was ‘fee’d’ out in Milltimber and I used to go on holidays to their croft. My husband had £5 a month as a fee’d farmer in the 1950s but you got your cottage, your milk, potatoes and vegetables too.



Chapter 15: The Tattie Cairt

I was born and brought up in Old Corse Town, which was a salmon-fishing village at that time. I left school at thirteen years, I was the last one to get exempt, and went to work in the farms. This was what my father did so it was natural that I would work there when I left school. I started on the tattie cairts when I was fourteen. As a family we moved around a few farms, first at Links farm in the Bridge of Don, then out to Loch Inch and by 1938 we were back at the Bridge of Don.

I worked for Jim Shepherd who started a tattie cairt. His farm grew vegetables and I went around various districts from the Bridge of Don to Urquhart Road, Seaton School and finishing off at Footdee, selling them. You could buy a bag full of carrots, turnips



The type of horse-drawn cart used by the 'tattie farmers'

and greens for three old pennies. You'd sell your stuff in the forenoon and then go back to the farm and get your tatties and veg for the next day. One lady I remember made pancakes to sell in the tattie cairt. Eggs too and everything! The cairt was horse drawn and those horses would always know their way home.

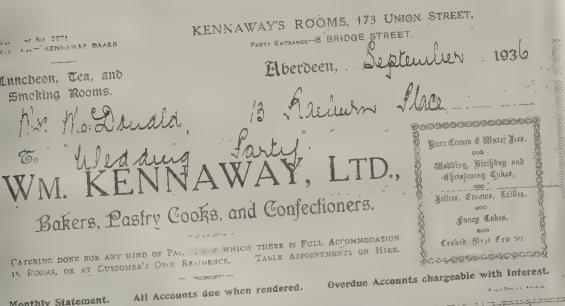
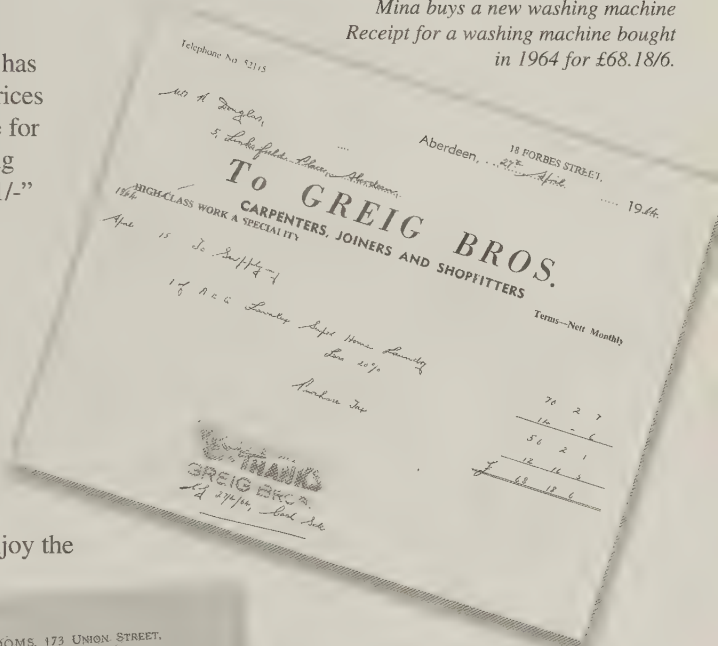
I remember some cottages, now demolished, which overlooked the Brig o' Balgownie. This was where desperate people, who had had enough of living, would end it all by leaping into the River Don. The local women would sit at their doors and if they saw a bonnet floating downstream they would say, "That's another poor soul gone." And notify the police. I once heard that there had also been a small chapel there, where bodies could be viewed and I don't know if it's true but I was told they always seemed to have a smile on their faces.

Later on I worked at the paper works and when I started there the Press & Journal was only four pages long! I nearly lost my life working there. There were these changing rails you see, and my boilersuit got caught in them and ripped off my body. I was thrown against the machines. The paperworks were next door to the prison and they used to complain about the noise from the factory. The factory was on the go all night in those days and the prisoners couldn't sleep!

Chapter 16: “A halfpenny worth of coffee as a treat.”

Mina buys a new washing machine
Receipt for a washing machine bought
in 1964 for £68.18/6.

Throughout this book there has been the odd reference to prices and costs. In the Castlegate for instance you could get a “big bag of sweets and fruit for 1/-” and a “halfpenny worth of coffee” from a shop in the Gallowgate. These prices are of course vastly different from today and this prompted the group to include a few receipts and notes of the various services and goods that they have bought during their lives. We hope you enjoy the comparison.



Isabella's
wedding
supper

Isabella
Smith's
wedding
reception
in 1936

Funeral Expenses:

Cremations (all
carried out by
Gordon & Watson
of Rosemount
Place, Aberdeen)

1974 - £126.47

1977 - £269.30

1995 - £1596.00

1999 - £1400.00

When making any payment please see that all entries are made by the Collector in duplicate

Month No. 1
RENT

through the Special Collection Sheet provided
ANY OTHER KIND OF ENTRY IS NOT OFFICIAL

Month No. 2
RENT

Month Commencing	AMOUNT PAID	Rec'd Date	REF No	ARREARS Card Paid	PREPAID	Month Commencing	AMOUNT PAID	Rec'd Date	REF No	ARREARS Card Paid	PREPAID
1969 B/fwd						1969 B/fwd					
May 28						1 Nov. 28					
June 28						2 Dec. 28					
July 28						3 Jan. 28					
Aug. 28						4 Feb. 28					

Excerpts from Conditions of Tenancy

- The rent shall be payable in advance on entry, and thereafter monthly in advance on the 28th day of each month.
- The tenancy shall be terminable by the tenant giving to the Housing Manager, St. Nicholas House, Broad Street, Aberdeen, or by the Housing Manager, on behalf of the Corporation, giving to the tenant, as the case may be, notice in writing not less than four weeks before the date on which it is to take effect.
- The tenant shall not assign his tenancy nor sublet the house in whole or in part, nor take in boarders or lodgers, except with the permission of the Corporation.
- The tenant shall conform to the Rules and Regulations prescribed by the Corporation relating to the care and management of the property and to the use by the several tenants of the wash-house and bleach-green, and to the use of the property in common use by the tenants. The and other parts of the property in common use, shall be in accordance with the Bye laws of the Corporation, 1933.
- No trade, profession, or business shall be carried on in the house, nor shall any professional notice, name-plate, or advertisement be affixed or exhibited without the previous consent, in writing, of the Corporation.
- The tenant, when required, shall at his own expense repair all breakages or damage to the property done by him and members of his household, and leave the premises in the same good repair and condition as when he entered into possession, ordinary wear and tear being excepted as when he entered into possession, ordinary wear and tear being excepted.
- Should the premises be to let, the tenant shall allow any persons with authority from the Corporation to see them three hours each day for three days per week until taken.
- The keeping of animals, e.g., dogs, cats, fowls, pigeons, &c., is prohibited unless with the written consent of the Corporation.
- The house, or any part of it, shall not be used for dancing or any other purpose which may cause annoyance to other tenants or do damage to the fabric of the house.
- No structural alterations in the property, and no erections, such as fences, tool-houses, sheds, or other similar erections, and no wireless poles or fittings will be permitted without the written consent of the Corporation.
- (a) In the event of the house being one to which access is obtained by an indoor common stair the lighting of which is dependent upon the lighting of lamps outside the house, on that stair, each tenant must light and keep lit, in rotation with the tenants of the other houses, as such rotation shall, taking agreement among the tenants, be determined by the Housing Manager, the lamp provided by the Corporation outside the entrance door to the house during the hours between sunset and midnight and, when sunrise is after 7.00 a.m. (local time), between 7.00 a.m. (local time) and sunrise.
- (b) In the event of the house being one to which access is obtained by an indoor common stair, the cost or proportion of the cost of the lighting which is not otherwise met by an individual tenant, shall be allocated proportionately among the tenants of the houses on the said stair by the Housing Manager.

PLEASE DO NOT BEND THIS CARD

CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF ABERDEEN

MONTHLY RENT CARD 1969-70

This Card is the property of the Corporation and constitutes a record of payments only.

Sanitary Dept.:

ST. NICHOLAS HOUSE, BROAD STREET

City Architect's Dept., Repairs Section:

ST. NICHOLAS HOUSE, BROAD STREET

Tel. No. 23456 Ext. 311 and 312

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THIS CARD IS PRODUCED WHEN A PAYMENT IS MADE

OFFICE HOURS: MONDAY TO FRIDAY 8.45 a.m. to 5 p.m.

DATE	RENT	RATES	REBATE	T/V	A/C	TOTAL
21/1/70	18/7	14/6		1/6	8/	1-14-1
28/1/70	4-6	3-2-8		1/6	2/	7-7-8

G=Garage T=TV Aerial H=Heating A=Ancillary

The amount due is payable in advance on the 28th day of each month. Cheques etc. should be made payable to the "City Chamberlain, Aberdeen" and crossed "Not Negotiable."

000000 411-421-68

Printed by the City of Aberdeen, Aberdeen

1239

62

54-

COPY OF MISSIVE OF LET TO BE RETAINED BY TENANT.

House Ref. No.

0 164 100/185

I hereby take from The City of Aberdeen District Council (hereinafter referred to as "the Council")
Apartments in House No. 164 Yellowgate
belonging to them (hereinafter referred to as "the property"), from 28th January 1977 to 28th January 1978 on the terms and conditions undernoted, and I agree to pay—
(1) the sum of 174.74 pounds SIXTY on the terms and conditions undernoted, and I agree to pay—
(2) the rates in instalments along with the rent, such instalment, on the basis of the current year's rates being SEVEN pounds SEVENTY FOUR pence (£ 7.74) as the rent of same.
(3) the sum of SEVEN pounds SEVENTY FOUR pence (£ 7.74) per month.
the following services and facilities, viz.— pence (£) per month in respect of
and I further agree that in the event of any increase or decrease in the amounts of the rates and/or charges for services and facilities in any subsequent period during the tenancy, the sum payable will be adjusted accordingly.

The Tenancy to be subject to the following Conditions:—

(a) I shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

4. I shall not alter the property without the prior permission of the Council

5. I shall conform with the conditions of the tenancy as aforesaid shall be

6. In the case of a road to the backs of the end houses, the Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

7. I shall keep the Council responsible for the cost of any other securing device

8. I shall keep the Council responsible for the cost of any other securing device

9. No trade, or advertisement shall be

10. If the property is used for any purpose other than that for which it was originally intended, the Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

11. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

12. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

13. No structure, or advertisement shall be

14. (a) In the case of a road to the backs of the end houses, the Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

15. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

16. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

17. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

18. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

19. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

20. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

21. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

22. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

23. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

24. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

25. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

26. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

27. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

28. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

29. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

30. The Council shall be responsible for the cost of any other securing device

- The rent shall be payable in advance on entry, and thereafter in advance on the 28th day of each month.
- The tenancy shall be terminable by the tenant giving to the Director of Housing Management, St. Nicholas House, Aberdeen, or by the Director of Housing Management on behalf of the Council giving to the tenant, as the case may be, notice in writing not less than four weeks before the 28th day of any month.
- (a) I shall at my own expense repair all breakages or damage to the property done by me or by members of my household and I shall leave the property in the same good repair and condition as when I entered into possession, for which repairs I shall be responsible. If such repairs have not been carried out at any date when the tenancy shall terminate, the Council shall be entitled to carry out such repairs for the cost of which I shall be liable.
(b) I shall at my own expense undertake all interior decoration and redecoration of the property and hereby accept responsibility for repair and replacement as required of the following items, viz.:—
Keys for internal and external doors: Door locks and door handles: Draught excluders to internal doors: Windows sash fasteners and lifting handles: Stopper plugs for sinks, tubs, baths and wash-hand basins: Blind rollers and fittings: Electric light bulbs and shades: Plug tops and plug fuses including fusable links in storage heaters: Elements and effect bulbs for electric fires: Immersion heaters installed by me/by a previous tenant or by the Council; Elements for gas fires: Clearing chokes in sinks and water closets caused by my fault or negligence or that of a member of my household; Freeing and repairing pipes frozen as a result of any carelessness or neglect on my part or on the part of a member of my household.
(c) In making arrangements for repairs or replacements for which I am responsible as aforesaid I undertake that all electrical work will be carried out by a qualified electrician in accordance with the Regulations of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.
(d) All damage caused to the roof, walls, plaster and woodwork in the property by reason of any installation by me or on my behalf of a television aerial will be made good by me or at my expense for which expense I shall be liable.
(e) The cost of reinstatement work required as a result of unauthorised alterations to the property carried out by me or on my behalf will be borne by me for which cost I shall be liable.
(f) I shall take every precaution to prevent damage by fire or by the bursting of water pipes and I shall notify immediately the City Architect, Repairs Section, St. Nicholas House, or the Director of Housing Management of any item requiring immediate repair or of any matter requiring immediate attention, whether or not the item or matter is one for which the Council are responsible.

[OVER

(b) In the event of the property being a house to which access is obtained by an indoor common stair, the cost or proportion of the cost of lighting of which is not otherwise met by me, I shall pay my proportion of the cost of the lighting of the said common stair as such proportion may be allocated amongst the tenants of the houses on the said common stair by the Director of Housing Management for which proportion I shall be liable.
The said deceased 16.12.77. Tenancy transferred to widow. Leaves tenant only.

COMPLETE HERE—

FULL NAME (IN BLOCK LETTERS)

WILLIAMINA DOUGLAS

Signature

Occupation Housewife

Present Address 164 Yellowgate

Date 12.1.78

Witness
2. Nicholas House
Aberdeen

This page and previous page: Mina's rent agreement and rent card Mina Douglas' rent agreement document and rent card for 1977-1978, when she paid £7.78 per month for an apartment in the Gallowgate.

Chapter 17: Druggies - A Poem

Lizzie Finlayson

Druggies

Breakfast over, showered and dressed
Didn't sleep well, still feel stressed
But time to take my aspirin
Soaked in water, keeps blood thin
Rise too quickly, room spins round
Grove about till right pill found
Postman calls, lots of bills
Blood pressure up, where's my pills?
Soon it's time to go for lunch
Indigestion, there's the crunch
Chesty pains and feeling sick
But Gaviscon will do the trick
I lie down for the afternoon
Evening papers come quite soon
What's this I read? Oh, not again
Young folk dealing in cocaine
Off to prison they are mugs
Relying on those dreadful drugs
Time for bed, one thing to do
My sleeping pill will see me through

Lizzie Finlayson



Members of the group with the Oral History Officer

Contributors

Mina Douglas
Babs Duncan
Lizzie Finlayson
George Harper
Doreen Jaffrey
Lena Jamieson
Betty Paterson
Vida Sim
Isabella Smith
Chris Still
William Tough

and other members of Denmore Court who wish to remain anonymous.

a Richt **Bourachie** *o' Fowk*

Editor: *Lisa Savijn*

Oral History Officer

Design: *Bill Smith*

Publicity and Promotions Unit

Illustrations: *Graham Fyfe M.A.*

With thanks to: **Aberdeen Oral History Department** and **Aberdeen City Common Good**

Also **Aberdeen City Council Archaeology Unit** for their assistance with the history of the Castlegate, and the **Central Library** and **Aberdeen Maritime Museum** for the use of additional photographs.



a Richt **Bourachie** *o' Fowk*

Shared within these pages is the story of Aberdeen during the first half of the 1900s. The stories are a collection of memories and experiences that are preserved here as a valuable insight for future generations to smile at and enjoy.

Denmore Court Oral History Group



www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

£3.00

ISBN 0-9548364-0-5

Produced by Aberdeen Oral History Department

KS-694-200